

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A method in a computer system of a service consumer for controlling exposure to liability for non-payment by the service consumer and controlling costs associated with requesting payment when a service provider provides services to the service consumer, the computer system having a processor, the method comprising:

receiving from the service provider a specification of a number of services within a billing unit for services provided by the service provider for the service consumer, the billing unit generated by the service provider and indicating a number of codes in a sequence from a start code to an end code;

generating by the processor the start code wherein the start code is not known to the service provider or the service intermediary at the time of generation by the service consumer;

generating by the processor a sequence of codes from the start code to an end code, the number of codes in the sequence corresponding to the number of services within the billing unit as specified by the service provider;

providing by the processor the end code to the service provider via the service intermediary; and

sending by the processor to the service provider a request for a service, the request including one of the codes of the sequence from which the end code can be derived so that the service provider can verify that the end code can be generated from the provided code;

wherein in response to the service provider being provided by the service consumer with the start code, the service provider requests payment for the billing unit from a financial entity by providing the start code to the financial entity; and

wherein the financial entity requests the service intermediary to verify that the end code can be generated from the start code; and

wherein the service intermediary verifies that the ~~start~~end code can be generated from the ~~end~~start code.

2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the service provider specifies different number of services for billing units for different service consumers to control exposure of the service provider to non-payment by that service consumer.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein specified number of services indicates the number of services which the service provider will provide before requesting payment.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Canceled)

6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the sequence is generated using a one-way function.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the specified number of services of the billing unit is selected to control incurring costs associated with requesting payments.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein when a service consumer disputes that the service provider provided services, the service intermediary resolves the dispute.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8 wherein the service intermediary resolves the dispute by requesting the service provider to provide the start code and when the provided start code can be used to generate the sequence of codes, determining that the service provider wins the dispute.

10. (Original) The method of claim 8 wherein the service intermediary resolves the dispute by requesting the service provider to provide the start code and when the provided start code cannot be used to generate the sequence of codes, determining that the service consumer wins the dispute.

11. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the specified number of services in a billing unit is based on costs associated with the service consumer registering with the service intermediary.

12. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the service intermediary generates the sequence.

13. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the service provider provides services requested by the service consumer.

14. (Currently Amended) A method performed by a computer system of a service provider for controlling exposure to liability for non-payment by a service consumer and controlling costs associated with requesting payment, the computer system having a processor and a memory, the method comprising:

providing by the processor to a service intermediary a number of services within a billing unit for the service provider and the service consumer;
receiving by the processor from the service intermediary an end code for the billing unit, the end code being generated by the service consumer based on the number of services within a billing unit;

for the number of services within a billing unit,
receiving by the processor a request from the service consumer to provide
a service, the request including a code; and
verifying whether the end code can be derived from the code;
when it is verified that the end code can be derived from the code included
in the request, providing the requested service; and
after the number of services have been provided, requesting by the processor
payment for the billing unit
wherein in response to a dispute arising, the service provider uses a start code
included in the last received request to demonstrate to the service
intermediary that the service consumer requested the number of services;
and
wherein the receiving steps are implemented via instructions stored in the
memory for execution by the processor.

15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14 wherein the service provider provides different numbers of services for billing units for different service consumers to control exposure of the service provider to non-payment by that service consumer.

16. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14 wherein the number of services indicates the number of services which the service provider will provide before requesting payment.

17. (Original) The method of claim 14 wherein the end code is derived using a one-way function.

18. (Original) The method of claim 14 wherein the number of services of the billing unit is selected to control incurring costs associated with requesting payments.

19. (Original) The method of claim 14 wherein when a service consumer disputes that it requested a service of the service provider, the service intermediary resolves the dispute.

20. (Original) The method of claim 14 wherein the service intermediary resolves the dispute by requesting the service provider to provide the start code and when the provided start code can be used to derive the end code, determining that the service provider wins the dispute.

21. (Original) The method of claim 14 wherein the service intermediary resolves the dispute by requesting the service provider to provide the start code and when the provided start code cannot be used to derive the end code, determining that the service consumer wins the dispute.

22-35. (Canceled)

36. (Currently Amended) A computer system for controlling exposure to liability for non-payment by a service consumer and controlling costs associated with requesting payment when a service provider provides services to the service consumer, the computer system, comprising:

- a service consumer computer of a service consumer;
- a service provider computer of the service provider; and
- a service intermediary computer of a service intermediary,

the service consumer computer ~~for~~ programmed to

~~receiving~~ receive from the service provider computer a specification of a number of services within a billing unit for services provided by the service provider for the service consumer, the billing unit generated by the service provider computer and indicating a number of codes in a sequence from a start code to an end code;

~~generating-generate~~ the start code wherein the start code is not known to the service provider computer or the service intermediary computer at the time of generation by the service consumer computer;

~~generating-generate~~ a sequence of codes from the start code to an end code, the number of codes in the sequence corresponding to the number of services within the billing unit as specified by the service provider computer;

~~providing-provide~~ the end code to the service provider computer via the service intermediary computer; and

~~sending-send~~ to the service provider computer requests for services, each request including one of the codes of the sequence;

the service provider computer ~~for~~ programmed to

~~sending-send~~ to the service consumer computer the specification of the number of services within a billing unit;

~~receiving-receive~~ from the service intermediary computer the end code;

~~receiving-receive~~ from the service consumer a request for the service that includes a code;

~~determining-determine~~ whether the end code can be derived from the code of the request for the service; and

upon determining that the end code can be derived from the code of the request for the service, ~~providing-provide~~ the requested service;

~~determining-determine~~ whether the code of the request for the service is the start code;

upon determining that the code of the request for the service is the start code, ~~sending-send~~ a request to a financial entity for payment for services provided, the request including the start code; and

the service intermediary computer ~~for~~ programmed to

~~receiving-receive~~ from the service consumer computer the end code;

~~providing-provide~~ to the service provider computer the received end code;

| ~~receiving~~receive from the financial entity the request for payment; and
| upon determining that the received end code can be derived from the start
| code of the request for payment, ~~sending~~send to the financial
| entity an indication that the service provider computer provided the
| requested services to the service consumer computer.